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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews Diana Baumrind's studies of the effect of various types of parental control on children's behavior and concludes that a child is more likely to develop a sense of competence, responsibility, and independence if he or she is given firm and reasonable guidelines. A brief survey of Baumrind's first two studies of preschool children and their parents indicates that, in association with other factors, firm parental discipline makes for competent children. Baumrind's third project, a longitudinal study of 150 children enrolled in nursery school in 1967 and their well-educated, middle-class families is examined in greater detail. The phase of research reported here was on the effects of different kinds of parental discipline upon children's instrumental competence (social responsibility, independence, orientation to succeed, and vigor). Three major types of parents were identified in this study, each having different effects on preschool children: (1) authoritarian (values obedience and the preservation of order; restricts the child's autonomy; no give or take); (2) authoritative (directs child's activities firmly, consistently and rationally; sets standards, but does not regard self as infallible); (3) permissive (gives child as much freedom as is consistent with child's physical survival). Children of authoritative parents were found to be most competent in nursery school. A follow-up study of 96 of the children and their parents when the children were between 8 and 9 years old indicated that, as before, children of authoritative parents were most competent. (CM)

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Parents as Leaders: The Role of Control and Discipline

by Herbert Yahraes

For almost two decades, research psychologist Diana Baumrind, of the University of California, Berkeley, has been conducting a major investigation into how various types of parental control affect children's behavior.

In her first study, Baumrind was concerned with three small groups of normal preschool children and their parents. Her findings can be summarized as follows:

- The most assertive, self-reliant, and self-controlled children had parents who were "controlling, demanding, communicative, and loving." Rather than ridiculing or frightening the child, or withdrawing their affection, these parents were ready to use corporal punishment. Generally, though, instead of punishing a child for behaving badly, they rewarded him for behaving well.
- The children who were discontented, withdrawn, and distrustful had parents who were relatively controlling but also detached.
- The children who had little self-control or self-reliance and who tended to retreat from new experiences had parents who were relatively warm but also noncontrolling and nondemanding.

In the second project, Baumrind, assisted by Allen E. Black, studied 95 preschoolers attending the university's Child Study Center and their parents. The findings suggest that "parental practices which are intellectually stimulating and to some extent tension-producing"—such as punitiveness, firm discipline, and expecting well of the child—"are associated in the young child with various aspects of competence. Techniques which fostered self-reliance—whether by placing demands upon the child for self-control and high-level performance or by encouraging independent action and decisionmaking—facilitated responsible, independent behavior. Firm discipline in the home did not produce conforming or dependent behavior in the nursery school." Moreover, the willingness of parents "to offer justification for their directives and to listen to the child when directing him were associated with indices of independence and social responsibility . . . Parental restrictiveness and refusal to grant sufficient independence were by contrast associated (particularly in boys) with dependent and passive behavior."

The findings of these two studies are thus in general agreement: In association with other factors, firm parental discipline makes for competent children.

Following Children Through Time

Baumrind's third project is a longitudinal study that got under way in 1967 and is still in progress. Its subjects are 134 white and 16 black children, originally enrolled in 13 nursery schools, and their well-educated middle-class families. The children's behavior has been observed both in school and, along with their parents', at home. In this phase of the research, Baumrind is particularly interested in learning the effects of different kinds of parental discipline upon a bundle of characteristics known as *instrumental competence.* This embraces such qualities as social responsibility, independence, orientation to succeed, and vigor. She defines these as follows:

> Social responsibility is behavior that is friendly rather than hostile to peers, facilitative rather than disruptive of others' work, and cooperative rather than resistive of adult-led activity. By late childhood, the qualities of objectivity and self-control are important correlates of social responsibility. Independence is behavior that is . . . goal-directed rather than aimless, and self-determining rather than conforming. Achievement orientation is behavior in which the child seeks rather than avoids intellectual challenge, and solves problems persistently and efficiently rather than inefficiently and impulsively. Vigor refers to the child's appearance of vitality and energy level.

This investigation has found three main types of parents, each of which has a different effect upon preschool—and also, presumably, older—children:

Authoritarian. This type "values obedience as a virtue and believes in restricting the child's autonomy . . . values the preservation of order and traditional structure as an end in itself. He or she does not encourage verbal give and take, believing that the child should accept the parent's word for what is right."

Authoritative. This kind "attempts to direct the child's activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner." Such parents value not only disciplined conformity on the part of the child but also the expression of self-will. "The child is directed firmly, consistently, and rationally; issues rather than personalities are focused upon; parent uses power when necessary; parent values obedience to adult requirements, as well as independence in the child; parent sets standards and enforces them firmly but does not regard self as infallible; parent listens to child but does not base decisions solely on child's desires." To achieve objectives, such parents use reason, power, and reinforcement, meaning rewards for acceptable behavior.

Permissive. Such a parent "behaves in an affirmative, acceptant, and benign manner toward the child's impulses and actions" and aims "to give the child as much freedom as is consistent with the child's physical survival. Freedom to the permissive parent means absence of restraint."

In this research, the kind of parental control called *authoritative* is associated with "responsible, assertive, and self-reliant behavior in preschool children" and comes out best.

In contrast, authoritarian control covers many areas of the child's

life "with extensive proscriptions and prescriptions," and places "arbitrary limits upon his autonomous striving to try out new skills and make decisions for himself." Such restrictiveness may well induce fear and undue submissiveness.

Permissive parents, as well as those designated authoritarian, differed significantly from authoritative parents because they "lacked confidence in their childrearing practices, did not enrich their children's environment, and, for boys, did not have a clearly defined child-rearing policy." Both types of parents "lacked balance between what was offered to the child in the way of support and what was demanded of him in terms of obedience." The permissive parents offered too much and demanded too little; the authoritarians demanded too much and offered too little. Permissive parents often say they want their children to be independent, but this research found that permissiveness was *not* associated with independence.

What does it take to be an authoritative parent?

For one thing, Baumrind finds, he or she must *not* be restrictive and suppressive. "An authority is a person whose expertise befits him to tell another what to do when the behavioral alternatives are known to both. In order to be an authority, the parent must be *expert.* Many parents and teachers have come to the conclusion that they are not expert about matters pertaining to the young people placed in their charge. Instead of aspiring to become more expert, they abandon their roles as authorities." But there is hope, because "much of what a parent needs to know can be learned from observing and listening to the child." By so doing, the parent "may acquire the information needed about the child and the child's peer group. Unlike the authoritarian parent, the authoritative parent modifies his or her role in response to the child's coaching, responding to suggestions and complaints from the child, and then transmitting these modified norms to the child.

> By becoming more expert, the parent thereby legitimates his or her authority. In order to be authoritative, the parent must be willing and able to behave *rationally.* The parent does not have to explain his or her actions to the child all the time, especially when the child obviously understands the reason but is engaging in harassment. But a parent does need to be sure that the basis for parental demands is just and that the child knows, as much as he or she is capable of understanding, the reasons behind these demands.

"In order to be authoritative," the investigator continues, "the parent must value *self-assertion, willfulness,* and *independence* in the child. The aim should be to prepare the child to become independent of parental control. Methods of discipline, while firm, must therefore be respectful of the child's actual abilities and capacities. As these increase, the parent must share his or her responsibilities and prerogatives with the child and expect more in the way of competence, achievement, and independent action."

Authoritative parents, Baumrind also reports, "tended to believe that they should be receptive to, and aware of, the child's needs and views before making any attempt to alter the child's actions and to see the child as maturing through stages with qualitatively different fea-

tures." Such parents also "tended to refer to the norm of reciprocity in Judeo-Christian terms, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'"

The First Followup

When the children were between 8 and 9 years old, 96 of them and their parents were again intensively studied through observation, interviews, and tests. Among the material analyzed were videotapes of family discussions of stories containing moral dilemmas.

At the time of the followup, the children of authoritative parents were still clearly the most competent. The authoritative mothers of girls got high marks for respecting their daughters' reasoning ability, training them in cognitive matters, and having self-confidence as a parent. The authoritative mothers of boys tended to direct their sons' lives but to delegate responsibility to them in household matters such as keeping up their rooms. The fathers of boys enforced orders but clearly held in mind their sons' individuality. The fathers of girls, like the mothers, tended to train them cognitively.

In general, the preliminary findings show, the *girls* who were competent and had a sense of "personal agency"—that is, thought that what they did mattered—came from families having "a childrearing pattern of firm control and somewhat stressful, abrasive interactions, particularly with their fathers." Analysis of the family interaction videotapes showed, however, that parental demands in these cases did not have a repressive effect. It showed also that the girls felt free to resist paternal direction and to "engage in playful role-reversal with their fathers," meaning that the girls in a bantering manner would sometimes tell their fathers what to do, instead of the other way around.

The case of the competent, believing-in-themselves *boys* was somewhat different. The videotapes showed that the fathers of such boys were relatively nondirective. However, this characteristic was "intimately associated with high expectations and implicit demandingness." In other words, "fathers of the most competent boys were *appropriately* nondirective in that their sons could be depended upon to act properly without direction." As one example, these boys were significantly more likely than other boys to talk and act competently during the family discussion. Baumrind reports that this same finding holds for the most competent girls, but that "for girls competency is actively elicited as part of the pattern of paternal directiveness," while for boys no elicitation was needed.

The Importance of Discipline

During the first 6 years of life, Baumrind holds, "the imposition of authority even against the child's will is useful to the child. . . . Indeed, power serves to legitimate authority in the mind of the child, to assure the child that his parent has the power to protect him and provide for his needs. . . . What makes a parent a successful reinforcing agent,

and/or an attractive model for a child to imitate, is his or her effective power to give the child what is needed. . . ."

During adolescence, "the contrasting views of authority viewed as justified versus authority viewed as illegitimate become particularly apparent." Baumrind cites a number of findings in support:

- A survey of Swedish adolescents found that teenagers accepted authority based on rational concern for their welfare but rejected authority based on the adult's desire to dominate or exploit the child.
- In another study, parental discipline viewed by the child as either very restrictive or very permissive was associated "with lack of closeness between parent and child and with rebellion against the parent's political viewpoints."
- Junior and senior high school students in a third study "were more likely to model themselves after their parents and to associate with peers their parents approved of if their parents used reason to explain decisions and demands."
- Still another investigation found "that maladjusted and aggressive high school boys described their parents as unloving" and that "boys who described their parents as both loving and controlling identified with their parents in both these characteristics."

Other research reviewed by Baumrind indicates that where both parents abstain from alcohol for religious reasons, children are more likely to refrain from drinking when they go to college; children whose parents do not smoke are more likely not to smoke; "adolescent drug use was least prevalent among traditional families who both disciplined their children and spent much time with them and for whom religion played an ongoing part. . . ."

The parents in Baumrind's studies frequently used some form of punishment—often corporal—to achieve compliance. In the longitudinal study, corporal punishment was used in all but two of the families. Permissive parents in that study admitted "to explosive attacks of rage in which they inflicted more pain or injury upon the child than they had intended."

The evidence from these studies, Baumrind reports, does not indicate that corporal punishment in itself was harmful or ineffective "but rather that the total pattern of parent control determined the effects on the child" of such punishment. She reports also that authoritative parents, "who were particularly effective, favored corporal punishment over other negative sanctions."

By *corporal punishment*, Baumrind means nonbrutal physical punishment delivered in response to behavior the child knows is not acceptable. It is different from brutal and arbitrary physical punishment, which many studies have shown to be associated with undesirable behavior. For example, such punishment has been linked to antisocial aggression and also to passivity, dependence, and social withdrawal. However, Baumrind continues, there is considerable evidence "that the use of punishment and coercion by parents is associated reliably with antisocial and nonachievement-oriented behavior in children when the

parent is also repressive, hostile, and restrictive, but not reliably when he is not." In fact, according to this investigator:

> It is reasonable to postulate that nonbrutal punishment, including physical expressions, by a loved and respected parent, if *consistently contingent upon the child's behavior*, should have, in addition to its effectiveness as a means of behavior control, side effects which are also beneficial, such as the following: (a) more rapid re-establishment of affectional involvement between participants following emotional release; (b) high resistance to similar deviation by siblings who vicariously experience punishment; (c) lessened guilt reactions to transgression since the parent inflicts an unpleasant consequence; (d) increased ability of the child to endure punishment in the service of a desired end if he should decide to persist; (f) willingness by the child to openly confront another within a power relationship rather than to deny or disguise anger, brought about by emulation of the aggressive parent; (g) increased feeling of internal control within defined limits since reinforcement is made consistently contingent upon the child's own action; (h) reduced dependency upon the parent as a source of gratification since the parent, by punishing the child, arouses ambivalent feelings toward himself.

From a review of research on punishment, Baumrind cites these findings: Punishment is most effective when given as closely as possible to the undesirable behavior, when it is consistent and cannot be escaped, and when it is accompanied by an explanation that specifies both the unacceptable behavior and a more desirable one. Also, parents should not use punishment "to eliminate behavior which the child is highly motivated to perform without offering alternative forms of behavior by which the drive can be redirected."

Temperament as well as upbringing plays an important role in what happens to a child. The ways in which these two factors interact to affect the development of social responsibility, independence, and originality, Baumrind points out, are not yet well understood. However, "we do know that children of different temperaments may be affected dissimilarly by like childrearing practices. For example, in order that by adolescence each may possess adequate self-confidence and social competence, a boy that is timid and fearful from birth will require more patient, gentle handling and more encouragement for his tentative movements toward independence than his sister, bold and energetic from infancy."

In sum, a child is more likely to develop a sense of competence, responsibility, and independence if he or she is given firm and reasonable guidelines. Most important, keep listening and take into consideration what your child has to tell you.

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